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A Prayer to Horus Praising Edfu

<https://doi.org/10.1515/zaes-2023-0008>

Summary: The article publishes a hieratic ostrakon from the Ramesside Period, now stored in the magazine of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities at Elkab and probably found in (Hagr) Edfu. The text is a prayer to Horus and belongs to the literary genre known as the ‘praises of cities’. The first lines present a close parallel to Ostrakon Nakhtmin 87/173, obverse, ll. 1–2, found in Theban Tomb 87; that ostrakon bears a prayer to Amun and dates back to Dynasty 18. A comparison of both versions shows how easily such poems could be adapted and how the texts were passed on to later generations. On the Edfu ostrakon, the copying work involved either a memory slip or perhaps a deliberate pun.

Keywords: Edfu – Hieratic Ostrakon – Praise of a City – Ramesside Period – Scribal Practice

During the British Museum Expedition to Elkab and Hagr Edfu in 2012, I was shown a large wooden box kept in the magazine of the now Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities at Elkab. It contained a mixture of bones wrapped in linen, fragments of cartonnage and wood, and some 380 ostraca. Some of the funerary items bear paper labels marked ‘Site: EdwA 2’, occasionally with further details. ‘EdwA’ refers to el-Adwa, a locality opposite Edfu, on the east bank of the Nile¹. The ostraca are unlabelled, but the majority are inscribed in Coptic and have been identified as part of a larger corpus excavated at Hagr Edfu². Some further ostraca in the box bear Greek and Demotic texts, but one, which will occupy us here, is inscribed in hieratic. Conceivably these further ostraca were mixed up with the rest, in which case the hieratic ostrakon could be from Hagr Edfu, el-Adwa or elsewhere in the wider Edfu–Elkab region. However, its text is dedicated to the god Horus, which strongly suggests that it

1 Cf. Effland 1999, 21, fig.; Abu Zeid 2004, 199–211.

2 Davies and O’Connell 2011, 7; 2012, 55–56. The Coptic ostraca are being studied by Anke I. Blöbaum, Münster. The Coptic pieces originate from fieldwork performed by the (then) Egyptian Antiquities Organisation at Hagr Edfu in 1981; cf. Gabra 1991, 1200 and Blöbaum 2013, 1–7. I wish to thank the inspectorate of Edfu, especially Ramadan Hassan Ahmed, Inspector of the Elkab magazine, for allowing me to study and publish the ostrakon. I am also grateful to W. V. Davies, M. Marée and E. R. O’Connell for their encouragement to do so.

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does come from (Hagr) Edfu – and so I refer to it hereafter as ‘O. Edfu’.

Fragmentary as it is, O. Edfu presents an interesting parallel to Ostrakon Nakhtmin 87/173 (hereafter ‘O. Nakhtmin’), obverse, ll. 1–3, from a tomb in Thebes, TT 87.³ That text is a prayer to Amun in three verses, while the reverse bears an invocation to Amun as a Nile god. O. Nakhtmin was first published by the excavator Heike Guksch in 1994. Since then, the full 8 lines on the obverse have been translated and discussed by various other scholars.⁴ Thus far, the Edfu ostrakon has only been briefly mentioned and illustrated in Davies and O’Connell 2012, 55–56, fig. 38, but it most certainly merits a closer examination.

The ostrakon is a reddish potsherd covered in a white slip. It measures 13.0 × 11.5 cm, with a thickness of 1.1–1.5 cm. One side bears two columns of hieratic text in black ink. Column I contains 4 horizontal lines, and column II comprised at least as many. The reverse of the ostrakon is blank. The sherd is worn and broken at the left and bottom-left edges. As a result, most of column II is missing and the ink is much effaced.

The ostrakon can be dated to the Ramesside Period, based in part on an analysis of the pottery⁵. The palaeography of the text points in the same direction, but the few surviving lines hardly permit a closer dating, as is generally the case with literary documents⁶. The spellings of certain words⁷ are typical of Late Egyptian texts, even though the grammar is slightly archaic⁸. While O. Nakhtmin contains

3 TT 87 belongs to the overseer of granaries of Upper and Lower Egypt, Minnakht or Nakhtmin. The context of the find and various palaeographical and linguistic details suggest that the ostrakon dates to the first half of Dynasty 18, no later than the time of Hatshepsut/Thutmose III (see Guksch 1994, 101–106, Stauder 2013, 31–33). O. Nakhtmin is one of several ostraca found reused as building material in the tomb.
 4 Guksch 1994, 101–106; Verhoeven 2004, 74–75; Burkard and Thissen 2008, 176; Ragazzoli 2008, 26, 100–101; Quack 2010, 20–21 and Popko 2013.

5 I owe this information to T. Beckh.

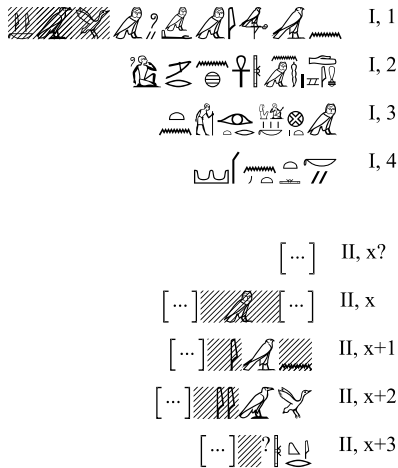
6 Fischer-Elfert 2002, 218 (223); Burkard 2013, 77–81.

7 E.g. *jmj* (written as **jmmj*), *mr.w*, *j3.t*, *k.t* (written with a book roll Gardiner sign Y1), the combined classifiers T14 and N25 for the word in line I, 4 (the latter combination was common from Seti I onwards; see Spalinger 2008, 144–47, 152–53).

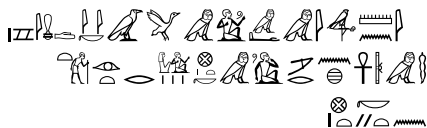
8 Ragazzoli 2008, 100–102, 120–23; Stauder 2013, 31–33. The archaising style is also apparent in O. Nakhtmin. Stauder points out that *p3j=k* on O. Nakhtmin is ‘not a “Late Egyptianism”’: to be one, it would have to lack deictic force. On O. Nakhtmin we are to translate *p3j=k* ‘this your’ (the Middle Egyptian reading), not ‘your’ (the Late Egyptian reading). Based on the available palaeographical, grammatical, linguistic and

the geminating participle *mrr.w*, the Edfu ostracon has simply *mr.w*, as might be expected in a Ramesside text. Also, the text includes the ‘praise of a city’, a literary genre that is mainly attested in Dynasties 19 and 20⁹. The present praise, here presented along with the parallel on O. Nakhtmin, reads as follows:

O. Edfu



O. Nakhtmin 87/173



O. Edfu	O. Nakhtmin 87/173
(I, 1) <i>n Hr^w jmj^b wj m [p3j=k]^f</i>	(1) <i>Jmn jmj wj m p3j=k dmj</i>
(I, 2) <i>dmj ndm^d nh mr.w^e</i>	(2) <i>ndm nh mrr.w m njw.t(j)=k r</i>
(I, 3) <i>m njw.tjw=k r jr.t j3w.t n⁹</i>	<i>jr.t j3w.t</i>
(I, 4) <i>k.t n.t^h</i>	(3) <i>n k.t njw.t</i>
(II, x+1) [...]m(?)[...]’	[text continues]
(II, x+2) [n(?)] Hr ^w (?) j[...]’	
(II, x+3) p3[j(=k?) ...]’ ^k	
(II, x+4) [?.] jkr(?) [...]’	

orthographical data, I would tentatively date O. Edfu to Dynasty 19 and regard *p3j=k* as the Late-Egyptian *non*-deictic possessive article.
⁹ Lichtheim 1980, 15; Ragazzoli 2008, 23–24; Quack 2010, 26–27; Moreno Garcia 2011, 256. P. Rainer 53 is usually dated to Dynasty 21, but, according to Quack and an unpublished lecture by R. Wassermann, it may even date to the late Libyan period. The genre would then have been used much longer than is generally thought.

(I, 1) To Horus: Let me be^m in [your]
 (I, 2) town,ⁿ which is pleasant to live (in)^o and beloved
 (I, 3) of your citizens/of one who is loved in your city,
 rather/more than spending old age/growing old in
 (I, 4) another city / **Kjtnt*.

(II, x+1) [...]
 (II, x+2) [to(?)] Horus(?) [...]
 (II, x+3) this/your [...]
 (II, x+4) excellent(?) [...]

^a The prayer on O. Nakhtmin starts immediately with the name of the god Amun, which has generally been interpreted as direct speech addressed to the god¹⁰. On O. Edfu, the god is introduced with the preposition *n*, ‘to’, before the prayer itself follows. This reminds us of the customary opening of informal letters¹¹. The prayer on O. Edfu has thus effectively been conceived in the form of a letter, in which the deity is the addressee. It confirms Joachim Friedrich Quack’s suggestion that praises of cities were directed to the god (or royal founder) of a city, rather than to the city itself. It is thanks to the deity that the city is so agreeable¹². Miriam Lichtheim has noted that ‘sometimes the “longing for the city” was incorporated in prayers, where it formed a subsidiary theme¹³’.

^b In Late Egyptian texts, this imperative may be spelled as *jmj*, *jm* or *jmm*; see Černý and Groll 1984, 349–50, and Junge 2008, 81–82, 153. I follow Guksch in reading *jmj*. The speaker appears in the first person singular and the imperative is addressed to Horus¹⁴.

^c When collating the original in February 2013, I found no traces of signs at the end of line I, 1, but there is ample space for the possessive article, which has probably faded away. In Late Egyptian, the preposition *m* usually required an article or a numeral to introduce a noun (here a place, *dmj*)¹⁵. This seems to warrant our reconstruction of *p3j=k*, as paralleled on O. Nakhtmin.

^d The writing of *ndm* with an initial *n* is according to Guksch only attested in Middle Kingdom texts¹⁶. However, Lesko provides two attestations in Late Egyptian in


¹⁰ Guksch 1994, 103–104, pl. 15; Verhoeven 2004, 74–75; Burkard and Thissen 2008, 176; Ragazzoli 2008, 26; Popko 2013.
¹¹ Cf. Wente 1990, especially chapters IX and XII.
¹² Quack 2010, 20, 28, 31, 38.
¹³ Lichtheim 1980, 17.
¹⁴ Guksch 1994, 104; Ragazzoli 2008, 26, 100–101; Popko 2013.
¹⁵ Černý and Groll 1984, 92–95. The phrase *p3j=k dmj* is also used in other hymns and prayers: e. g. O. BM EA 41543 and EA 50719+50732 (Demarée 2002, 28, 32, pl. 95–96, 111).
¹⁶ Guksch 1994, 104, with reference to Erman and Grapow 1928, 378.

which *ndm* is spelled with an initial *n*¹⁷. On O. Nakhtmin *ndm* is written as usual without the *n*. The interpretations that have been offered for the syntax of this passage in discussions of O. Nakhtmin are summarised by Popko (who overlooks Quack's contribution)¹⁸. Following Guksch and Quack, I see *ndm* as an attributive participle used without a resumptive element for the antecedent *dmj*¹⁹. For the present meaning of *ndm* 'nh, see Erman and Grapow 1928, 379, 18.

^e Where the Edfu ostrakon has *mr.w*, O. Nakhtmin has the geminated form *mrr.w*. This is explained by the fact that O. Nakhtmin is older and more archaic in style, with hardly any Late Egyptian elements. As the Edfu ostrakon is of Ramesside date, it is not surprising to find that the gemination has been dropped: after Dynasty 18 it was rarely used in Late Egyptian texts²⁰. Popko again sums up the interpretations that have been offered with reference to O. Nakhtmin (again not citing Quack's work). For the Edfu ostrakon, I favour a parallelism between *ndm* and *mr.w* as two participles modifying *dmj*²¹. Quack has pointed out that the expression *mrr m njw.tjw=k* is paralleled in a prayer praising Thebes on O. UC 39638 = Petrie 39²².

^f Following the majority of translations, I interpret the phrase *r jr.t j3w.t* as a comparative²³. For the literary topos of 'spending old age at home', see Guksch 1994, 104e; Verhoeven 2004; Ragazzoli 2008.

^g The writing of *n* for the preposition *m* is well documented; see Černý and Groll 1984, 54 and Stauder 2013, 32, 71.

^h Where O. Nakhtmin clearly reads *k.t njw.t*, 'another city'²⁴, the present text gives **Kjint*, which is concluded by the combined determinatives  'throw-stick (Gardiner sign T14)' and 'foreign land/desert sign (Gardiner sign N25) as if it denoted some foreign toponym'²⁵.

¹⁷ Lesko 1984, 43.

¹⁸ Popko 2013; Quack 2010, 20.

¹⁹ *Ndm* is spelled without the prothetic *yod*. The use of the prothetic *j* is known only from Dynasty 19 (Rameses II onwards) usually for biliteral verbs and occasionally for trilateral verbs. Participles usually show this affix with certain verbs which are listed by Černý and Groll 1984, 463–65. But the graphic expression of this element in participles was optional. Regrettably, the presence or absence of the *yod* offers no clue for dating a source more precisely within the Ramesside Period. See also Winand 1992, 344–53 and Junge 2005, 66–68.

²⁰ Winand 1992, 264–65, 360–63.

²¹ Popko 2013; Quack 2010, 20.

²² Quack 2010, 22 (10).

²³ Popko 2013; Quack 2010, 20.

²⁴ *Contra* Guksch 1994, 104–105, but following Quack 2010, 20; Popko 2013.

²⁵ Loprieno 2001, 78, 81. According to Spalinger 2008, 144–47, 152–53, 161, the combined use of both determinatives, apparently first attested


These determinatives are difficult to explain, and I am unaware of a place called **Kjint* or the like. Were it not for O. Nakhtmin, the original meaning of this passage would elude us. Two different explanations for the curious spelling are discussed further below: either the scribe intended what is meant on O. Nakhtmin, but spelled it incorrectly, or he intentionally created, or copied, an otherwise unknown word **Kjint*.

ⁱ It is unclear how many lines, if any, might have preceded line II, x+1. Due to the poor preservation of column II, it is even uncertain if this is a continuation of the text in column I. A bird sign, apparently an *m*-owl G17, may be followed by a trace of an *j*-reed M17. It is impossible to recognise any other signs in this line.

^j Line II, x+2 might mark the beginning of a second or even third verse of the prayer. The *n* and falcon signs, if read correctly, could be another invocation of Horus, paralleling the same construction in line I, 1. O. Nakhtmin bears three verses, all of which may have been present on O. Edfu as well. It is unclear how much of our potsherd is lost. Perhaps the second verse was lost at the upper left, while traces at the lower left might have been part of the third verse. Judging by the almost complete verse of column I, which is some 8 cm wide, only half of column II has been preserved.

^k Only the demonstrative adjective *p3j* is clear. The next sign is partly preserved but cannot be identified with certainty. If this line formed part of a new verse, it might be reconstructed as a further instance of the phrase [*jmj wj m*] *p3j*[=*k dmj*], 'let me be in your town'.

^l The first group of signs fits the reading *jkṛ*, 'excellent', but O. Nakhtmin does not feature this word. The *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae* cites many expressions involving *jkṛ* from all literary genres (teachings, love songs, letters, etc.), but none of these seem reconcilable with the traces that follow on O. Edfu. Nor is it likely that the line contained a colophon, because few known colophons include the term *jkṛ*²⁶. The original content of column II must remain uncertain, especially as it need not have been a continuation of the text in column I. Note, for instance, that O. DeM 1232 contains, in its first two lines, the praise of a city (Thebes?) beside the Teaching

from the reign of Seti I on, marked the 'foreign nature of [a] person or locality'. It is hard to see why O. Edfu should have had the general word for 'city' written phonetically and with these determinatives. The word 'city' was always written with the ideogram  (Gardiner sign O49) and without a determinative; see Erman and Grapow 1928, 210.

²⁶ Lenzo Marchese 2004, 361. Lenzo Marchese cites only the colophon of the Shipwrecked Sailor, but there are further examples, e. g. P. Anastasi III, 4.6–7 (Gardiner 1937, 25). *Jkṛ* could also be used in the context of a scribal apprenticeship; see McDowell 2000, 219, 223–33.

of Ptahhotep (ll. 3-7)²⁷. It is also possible that the prayer on O. Edfu was embedded in a letter or model letter. Other arrangements are also conceivable²⁸.

- ^m The phrase *jmj wj* admits of two possible interpretations. Ragazzoli, in her discussion of O. Nakhtmin, thinks that the speaker does not want to be removed from the city. Adjusting her translation for O. Edfu, we would have to read: ‘Horus, hold me in your town²⁹!’ However, we could also read: ‘Horus, let me be (back) in your town!’ The latter reading finds support in a similar expression *jnj wj r njw.t=k Jmn*, ‘Bring me (back) to your city, Amun’, as found in the praise of a city on O. UC 39638 and the close parallel on O. DeM 1594³⁰.
- ⁿ The words *dmj*, ‘town’, and *njw.t*, ‘city’, have been widely discussed in the literature; Ragazzoli provides a summary. In Ramesside times, Edfu was probably referred to as a *dmj*, not a *njw.t*³¹.
- ^o The expression *p3j=k dmj ndm ‘nh* appears also in various papyri. One of these is P. Sallier I = P. BM EA 10185, 8.3, which contains a prayer to Thoth and expresses a longing for Hermopolis. P. Rainer 53, 4 praises the city of Piramesse in the same terms³². Both papyri have been found in Saqqara, far from the cities they praise, but we must remember that they were scribal exercises (from the *Late Egyptian Miscellanies* corpus). O. Edfu and O. Nakhtmin with prayers to Horus and Amun, are from the vicinity of these deities’ cities, but certainly these texts were also scribal exercises.

²⁷ Posener 1951, 34, pl. 58 a.

²⁸ Ragazzoli 2008, 30.

²⁹ For O. Nakhtmin, see Ragazzoli 2008, 26 (‘Amon, retiens-moi dans ta ville’); 2011, 27 (‘Amun, hold me in your city!’).

³⁰ For these ostraca, see Ragazzoli 2008, 34–36, 132. Other texts that include praises of cities and letters that contain similar expressions include O. Cairo CG 25766 (Ragazzoli 2008, 39–41), obv. 4 (*jmj n-j Jmn šd=k (wj)*, ‘Come to me, Amun, to rescue (me)’) and P. Geneva D 407 (Černý 1939, LRL 8), obv. 6 (*mtw Jmn jnj=k jw=k wd3.tj* ‘And may Amun bring you (back) safe’ cf. Wente 1990, 187).

³¹ See e. g. P. Bibliothèque Nationale 199, V–IX + 196, V + 198, IV (Černý 1939, LRL 3, late Dynasty 20), rev. 7, ‘*dmj Db3* (Edfu)’, and P. Turin Cat. 2013 + 2050 + 2061, obv. I, 3 (Ramesses IX). However, Greco-Roman inscriptions in the temple of Edfu typically refer to Edfu as a *njw.t*; see the texts listed in the *Thesaurus Linguae Aegyptiae*, <http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/> [22.05.2023], under the search term *Db3*, ‘Edfu’.

³² The repeated use of the same descriptions has already been noted by Verhoeven 2004, 77. For *ndm ‘nh* as a description for locations, see e. g. *p3 hnw ndm ‘nh* in P. Anastasi III, 2.1 (Gardiner 1937, 21; Caminos 1954, 73–76). In Graeco-Roman times *ndm ‘nh* is used as a description of Edfu itself: Rochemonteix 1892, 138, and Chassinat 1930, 396.

O. Edfu and scribal practices

O. Nakhtmin is the oldest known example of the ‘praises of cities’ genre³³, but O. Edfu is the only close parallel. As we have seen, column I of O. Edfu is practically identical to the first verse of the Theban version. The main difference is the god to whom the prayer is addressed. Neither O. Edfu nor O. Nakhtmin names the towns that are praised. Both express a longing for a city as part of a larger prayer. At the time of writing, there are 18 known versions of praises of cities³⁴, almost all from the Ramesside Period³⁵ (the exceptions being O. Nakhtmin and a graffito in TT 63, likewise from Dynasty 18). But none of the other attestations are connected to Horus or Edfu³⁶.

O. Edfu shows how easily existing prayers were borrowed and adapted to different locales, simply by changing the divine addressee. It seems likely that these prayers were adapted for many other cities³⁷. Changing the addressee and, where named, the location would have been the easiest way to create a prayer appropriate to any one town. In fact, the praises of cities focus primarily on deities, not on the cities of which they were the patrons³⁸, so there was no need for any details on the cities. We have already seen that the opening of O. Edfu is even cast in the form of a letter, addressed to the god with the preposition *n*³⁹.

The parallel from Thebes affords some insight into the processes that shaped the text on O. Edfu⁴⁰. Our inquiry into these processes should inform all attempts at explaining the curious phrase *k.t n.t* in l. I, 4. It should be noted at the outset that the scribe of O. Edfu would have known the

³³ Guksch 1994, 101–106; Burkard and Thissen 2008, 176.

³⁴ Lichtheim, 1980, 15; Verhoeven 2004, 74; Burkard and Thissen 2008, 176; Ragazzoli 2008, 22, 24, 116, 146; Quack 2010, 20, 26–28, 43–44; Dorn 2011, 281, 284; Moreno Garcia 2011, 256; Ragazzoli 2011, 27. Ragazzoli lists 21 documents with 16 versions of the genre. For a 17th version, known only from a small fragment of an ostrakon found on Elephantine Island, see Fischer-Elfert 2002, 217. An 18th version concerns a prayer in praise of Piramesse (O. Ashmolean Museum HO 1187, see Fischer-Elfert 2016, 195–218).

³⁵ After the New Kingdom the genre was seemingly abandoned, but Quack 2010, 26–27, remarks that P. Rainer 53 might document it for the late Libyan period.

³⁶ Lichtheim 1980, 17; Ragazzoli 2008, 100, 131–34; Quack 2010, 41–43. The praised locations are: Piramesse, Memphis, Heliopolis, a domain of Raia, Hermopolis, Thebes, Elephantine/Assuan and now probably Edfu. The deities mentioned are Amun-Re, Re, Pre-Harakhti, Ptah, Thoth, and now Horus.

³⁷ Fischer-Elfert 2002, 217. An example found in Elephantine (dating to Dynasty 19?) also points in this direction.

³⁸ Assmann 1984, 29–35; Quack 2010, 25–43; Dorn 2011, 282; Moreno Garcia 2011, 256.

³⁹ This device not repeated in any of the other known praises of cities.

⁴⁰ Burkard 1977, 2–3; Parkinson 2002, 52–53.

prayer to Horus from another source, which may or may not have contained the same ostensible corruption. Either he miscopied/mis-remembered an instance of *k.t njw.t* as *k.t n.t*, or he copied/remembered an earlier instance of **Kjnt*. Scribal copying practices in ancient Egypt are a subject of ongoing debate⁴¹, but the scribe of O. Edfu would have copied a model text, which was either placed before him or read aloud by an instructor. Alternatively, the prayer could have been common knowledge, and the scribe knew the text by heart.

kj.t n.t: a memory slip?

If O. Edfu documents a meaningless error, it would have occurred as the scribe wrote from memory or as the text was dictated. Maybe *n.t* arose simply as a phonetic spelling of *njw.t*, ‘city’⁴², even though in line I, 3 its derivative *njw.tjw*, ‘citizens’, is written conventionally with the *njw.t*-sign. Perhaps the scribe did understand the intended words but forgot the right spelling, in a lapse of attention. This, however, seems unlikely as it leaves the curious determinatives unexplained. More probably he failed to understand the words as they were being dictated, in which case he could still record their approximate sound *and* meaning. The context implied the approximate meaning: some kind of geographic designation⁴³. Judging from the determinatives, the scribe decided that the puzzling sounds denoted a foreign location, and so he added the throw-stick and foreign land determinatives⁴⁴. Such corruptions are commonly found in scribal exercises, and ostraca were commonly used for this purpose⁴⁵. Lichtheim has proposed that

41 Burkard 1977, 1–4, 72, 116–17, 143–44; Morenz 1996, 52–57; McDowell 2000, 221 (with further references); Morenz 2008, e.g. 289–96. Burkard discusses the possible kinds of errors found in Egyptian literature, linked to various scribal practices. Memory errors seem to have been the commonest type of error; for the possible causes, cf. Rößler-Köhler 1979, 28–45, 149–53. Burkard and Quack 1994, 23–25, note that auditory errors are much harder to spot, especially since the ancient pronunciation of the words is unknown.

42 In fact, Edel 1980, 18–20, has argued that the Egyptian word for ‘city’ may be best transliterated as *n.t* or *n’.t*, rather than as *njw.t*.

43 Volten 1937, 24–28; Burkard 1977, 144–45.

44 I owe this idea to R. Demarée. For memory slips, cf. Silverman 1989, 43, with regard to the Coffin Texts: ‘In some cases, errors might have been so severe that creative editing had to be resorted in order to make any sense out of the passages.’

45 Volten 1937, 7–36; Burkard 1977, 3–4, 74–75, 114, 144–45, 320; McDowell 2000, 219–23, 230–33. According to McDowell, hymns and prayers provided typical material on ostraca for writing during the apprenticeship of scribes. However, the *Late Egyptian Miscellanies*, which are exercises of advanced scribes, are preserved on papyri.

the topos ‘city and country’ ‘emerges in the literature of the New Kingdom, specifically within that class of writings which we call “school literature”⁴⁶.’ Quack has suggested that more advanced scribes used the genre of praises of cities to practice their writing skills, as well as to enhance their intellectual competence, in the furtherance of their official careers⁴⁷. It is hard to know what might have been the direct cause for a scribal mistake on O. Edfu, especially as we have only one parallel text, but its prayer to Horus was certainly a school exercise – with an obvious potential for strange mistakes.

**Kjnt*: an intentional invention?

Another hypothesis would be that the scribe of O. Edfu truly intended to write a word **Kjnt*, although no such word is known to us. Could it be that he invented an alternative meaning for the passage? Did he purposely imagine some alien place that was worse than any other city⁴⁸? At first glance, *Kjnt* fulfills Guglielmi’s criteria for a pun as the sound of the original expression *k.t njw.t* is preserved in a kind of phonetic spelling; most importantly, it also features a double meaning⁴⁹. But a pun needs two to several morphemes in a text, playing with a certain expression, to meet this definition. Our ostrakon might present a playful

46 Lichtheim 1980, 15; McDowell 2000, 221, 231; Verhoeven 2004, 66; Ragazzoli 2008, 112, 138–39, 160, 210; Quack 2010, 37–38. Ragazzoli points to a more sophisticated view of this genre: (love and model) letters, various teachings, as well as scribal exercises share similarities with the ‘Praises of Cities’. Five cases (including O. Nakhtmin and the Elkab version) show the same or similar text on several copies (10 texts). This indicates that, at least in some cases, they may be identified as school exercises. The possible combination of letter and praise confirms Ragazzoli’s view.

47 Ragazzoli 2008, 138–39, 210; Quack 2010, 36–38. Quack’s idea fits with the suggestion made by McDowell 2000, 221, 233, regarding scribal students at Deir el-Medina: ‘they seem to have shared an Egypt-wide idea of the educated man.’ This would be one explanation for the standardised phraseology in praises of cities: longing for these places was an established topos.

48 Guglielmi 1986, 1287–91; Loprieno 2003, 31–51; Morenz 2008. Guglielmi points to puns used in Ramesside toponymy, e.g. P. Anastasi I 21,3 ‘... den Übergang von *Dr‘m* (semitisch “Hornissen”). Du wirst sagen: „Das brennt mehr als ein Stich!“

49 Guglielmi 1984, 491–93. ‘Das Wortspiel ist eine Klangfigur und gehört zu den sprachlichen Elementen auf der Morphem-Ebene, deren Wirkung auf der Ähnlichkeit zweier oder mehrerer Morpheme in einem Text oder Textabschnitt beruht.’ She describes different categories for puns. Kategorie 2, a phonetic similarity with the original word alongside a semantic difference, would be suitable. But Guglielmi excludes the option of ‘homophone Wortspiele’ because of the missing vocalisation in Egyptian.

writing that changes the original meaning but maintains the general sense of the passage. Playful writings were common in Egyptian literature and could include the creation of new words or terms⁵⁰. The Egyptians made a clear distinction between a familiar place (with the city sign O49) and a foreign location (with the foreign signs T14, N25)⁵¹. The intention of the text obtains even more significance in using the invention **Kjnt** instead of the simple expression ‘any other city’. Egypt, too, is perhaps glorified by this intentional change to the ‘correct’ expression *k.t njw.t* as it was obviously better to be at home than to live in a foreign place. Amusingly, the word (for) city, which is usually determined with the local and particularly home-like city sign, Gardiner sign O49, is written here with the foreign classifiers⁵².

However, the possibility that our ostrakon preserves an advanced scribal exercise remains. For instance, O. Cairo CG 26761 might comprise a special training text of the scribe Ramose ‘– vermutlich eine Prüfung in spezifischer hoher Schriftkompetenz –⁵³’ which was used to prove and test his knowledge, qualifications, expertise and ideas in writing and script. In the case of an intentional change in meaning, there is the requirement that the reader or recipient possesses the awareness and ability to recognise such a word play. The actual ‘phonetic pun’ in O. Edfu would only have been recognisable (especially in script, and phonetically) to someone who knew the original version of the term or, through common knowledge, the general phrases of *laudes urbis*. This is plausible, for the terms were frequently in

use in prayers, hymns and letters (as we saw above)⁵⁴. To be understandable, our ‘phonetic’ pun need not necessarily have required an equivalent or related expression or second morpheme in the actual text⁵⁵. Maybe *Kjnt* was an intentionally non-existent toponym written in a similar orthography in order to emphasise the original content and meaning. Such an interpretation would fit the correct spelling *njw.tjw*, ‘citizens’ in line I, 3, and an intentional, maybe even derogative, spelling of *k.t njw.t* in line I, 4⁵⁶.

Summary

The ostrakon stored in Elkab is a parallel of O. Nakhtmin, with minor changes made to it in order to render praise to another god and place. Furthermore, the plea to Horus shows how such texts maintained a shared sense, and how knowledge of their genre was passed on over the decades from Dynasty 18 onwards. It could be identified as a writing exercise. If this is the case, it was probably an advanced student who wrote it down. He might have been a rather intelligent individual who consequently tried to make the best of the situation, and who managed to preserve the intended sense of the final line, by accident, in a memory slip *k.t n.t <njw.t>*, or by intentionally playing with words or repeating/copying the already existing (‘phonetic’) pun *Kjnt*. The unusual column II may also be similarly explained: The fragmentary lines could have been the

50 Sander-Hansen, 1948, 2–22 (especially 20 fictitious toponyms and city names in the Pyramid Texts); Morenz 1975, 328–42; Guglielmi 1984, 493 and 1986, 1287–91. See also Morenz 2008, e. g. 26–28, 41, 48–49, 64–65, 85–87, 288–93.

51 Loprieno 2003, 42–51; Spalinger 2008, 140, 142, 149, 155; Quack 2010, 25; Ragazzoli 2008, 176; Ragazzoli 2011, 22, 25. This concept is reminiscent of Sinuhe’s return to Egypt, the Shipwrecked Sailor and Wenamun’s journey. According to Spalinger, in the late New Kingdom, names of cities could even occur with the writing of all three determinatives: city, throw-stick and foreign land. He could imagine from Dynasty 19 onwards that scribes paid less attention to their exact choice of determinatives. But there is no example in which *njw.t* is written in that way.

52 According to Morenz 2008: ‘In der konkreten Anwendung hatte der einzelne Schreiber einen großen Spielraum, und er konnte sowohl bekannte Zeichen variieren als neue Zeichen hinzu erfinden, als auch Bilder als Hieroglyphen verwenden und umgekehrt sowie zudem verschiedene Layouts wählen.’ (43), ‘Tatsächlich sind sowohl die sinnstiftende als auch die intellektuell-spielerische Dimension wesentliche Bereiche der Visuellen Poesie, die oft miteinander verbunden auftreten und kaum lupenrein voneinander zu trennen sind.’ (48)

53 Morenz 2008, 113–16. O. Cairo CG 26761 dates to year 5, Ramesses II. The hieratic text plays with the hieroglyphic depiction of the name *Dhwtj-ms* on the ostrakon.

54 Guglielmi 1984, 492–93. This would fulfil her second criterion for a pun: Repeating the consonants while changing the semantics slightly and constructing a word from the same or similar phonetic. Furthermore, the graphical meaning and playing would have been the more important issue: we cannot anymore determine a real phonetic identity due to the loss of the vocalisation.

55 A further option would be an unknown locality *Kjnt*. But this is most unlikely as no suitable toponym is to be found in any other text and the term recalls quite convincingly the original, parallel phrase on O. Nakhtmin. The interpretation and translation of the passage given by Guksch ‘ein Geringer der Stadt’ for the Theban version does not seem to be feasible when compared with O. Edfu. Another locality was most likely indicated at the end of verse 1 in the prayer to Amun, which is proven by the unusual expression in our case. Guksch 1994, 104–105. 56 Cf. P. Anastasi IV, 12.5–13.8 (Gardiner 1937, 48; Caminos 1954, 188–89), where a location *Knkn-n-t* is mentioned which the scribe of O. Edfu may have known. Caminos wrote: ‘[The name] means literally “castigation of the land” and should perhaps not be taken too seriously as a geographical name. It might have been coined by the writer, as it befits the accursed place suspiciously well.’ Perhaps the unknown location *Y3rw* in the *Late Ramesside Letters*, repeatedly mentioned by the scribe *Dhwtj-ms*, should also be interpreted as fictitious: P. Bibliothèque Nationale 197, IV (Černý 1939, LRL 7), obv. 6, P. BM EA 10326 (Černý 1939, LRL 9), obv. 5, P. Leiden I, 369 (Černý 1939, LRL 1), obv. 9–10 and P. Turin Cat. 1973 (Černý 1939, LRL 2), rev. 2.

beginning of a further verse or even another text. The other signs, which are difficult to identify, might comprise the rest of his scribal attempts, but maybe also some other kind of literature, maybe as part of a (model) letter⁵⁷.

O. Edfu allows an insight into scribal education and literary communication strategies three millennia ago, but also demonstrates that ancient ‘reality is more complex than any rules we devise to explain it: education in Egypt was practiced by individuals and was therefore adapted to individual circumstances and personalities⁵⁸.’

Acknowledgements: For useful comments, I am grateful to G. Burkard, R. Demarée, H.-W. Fischer-Elfert, F. Hagen, A. Hutterer and S. Wimmer. The contribution was originally submitted and accepted in 2013 for BMSAES, but due to the long delay for publications, resubmitted for ZÄS.

Ringgold ID: 153611

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⁵⁷ Ragazzoli 2008, 30. Cf. O. DeM 1232 with a praise of a city and the Teaching of Ptahhotep on the same side of the ostrakon; O. DeM 1068 with a spell of the Book of the Dead in column I and a donkey hire in column II which was added later.

⁵⁸ McDowell 2000, 233.

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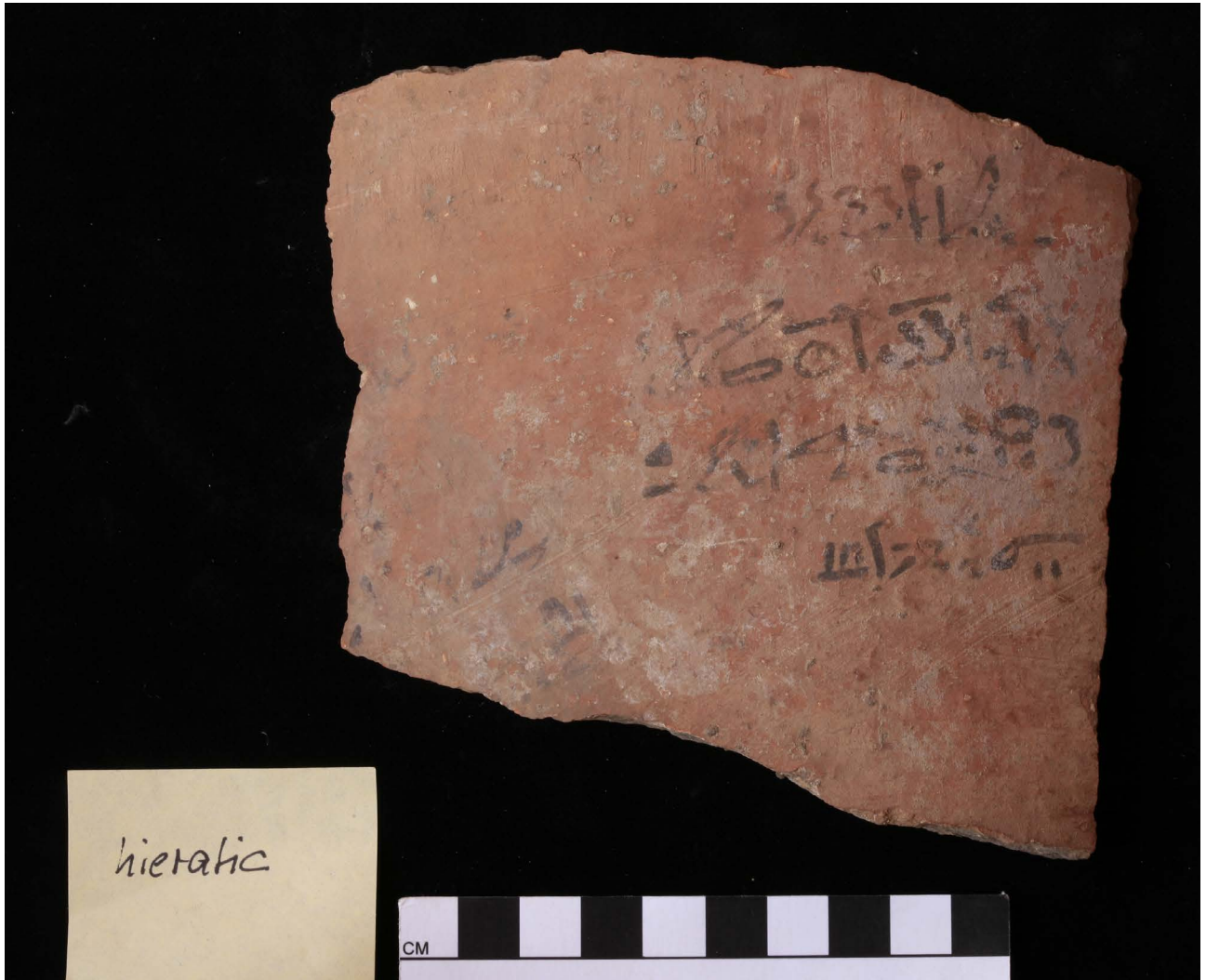


Figure 1: The hieratic ostrakon in the MoTA magazine at Elkab (Photo: James Rossiter).